Technical and Semantic Aspects in Viorel Munteanu's
Symphony No. 2

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Abstract: Symphony No. 2, a recent creation of composer Viorel Munteanu (first performance in 2021), is a fascinating, modern and provocative work. It is part of the *"Shadows and Genesis"* cycle, accumulating the effort of over thirty years of experience: "My shadows and genesis are quasi-permanent sources of inspiration; they are themes always born and reborn from my own evolution"[1]. *Symphony No. 2* stands out through the massiveness of its structure, the originality of the orchestration and its character deeply anchored in Romanian folklore motifs. The sources of inspiration, "shadows and genesis", can be recognized, through references to previous creations and to Enescu's music, as well through its use of the "George Enescu" melogram. The symphonic work is made up of five parts, entitled suggestively: - I. *Imprints*, II. *Contrasts*, III. *Heterophonies*, IV. *Byzantine Sources*, V. *Dance of colors*. This paper presents the compositional techniques, Viorel Munteanu's fascination for the melograms - melodic "codes" transformed into the main thematic profile - and proposes an interpretation of the sound images generated by the expressive orchestration and thematic richness.

Keywords: Viorel Munteanu; *Symphony No. 2*; melogram; orchestration; themes.

1. Introduction

Viorel Munteanu is a composer who has dedicated himself to the symphonic genre, creating a total of 22 works. His creation comprises of two symphonies (*Symphony No. 1 "Gloss"* and *Symphony No. 2* from the cycle *"Shadows and Genesis"*), a flute concert, the cantata *Stephen the Great*, a vocal-symphonic poem (*The Voices of Putna*) and an oratorio. Leaning towards spirituality and depth of artistic expression shown through music, the composer from Iasi is living in prayer, seeking inner peace, always looking inward.

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[1] Viorel Munteanu, *Presentation of the work for acquisition by UCMR* [Presentation of the work for acquisition by UCMR], manuscript.

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2. Analysis of work

The first part, ***Imprints***, is dominated by mystery, uncertainty, which broadly speaking creates, the sound of old, past times. Structurally, it is a prelude showing "a synthetic and enunciative representation of the essential motifs that will persist through the entire *Symphony* (the status of *prolegomena* for the entire cycle)"[2].

The first motif (**α** – the "George Enescu" melogram) is played by the celesta, generating a magical sound universe. The modal structure of the melogram, together with the sounds added, determines the symmetrical modal configuration 3-1-2-1. The note ***D*** (mobile step) determines the oscillation between the Phrygian mode (*Db-C*) and the chromatic 3 mode (*C-D#*), the note *C* having the role of an axis. The same modal structure is performed by strings in the higher register, in 16ths, providing tension to the sonic discourse.

Fig. 1 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part I – *Imprints*, mm. 1-3

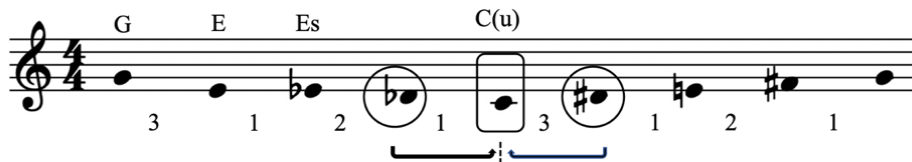[2] Viorel Munteanu, Presentation of the work for acquisition by UCMR, manuscript, p. 2.

Fig. 2 Modal structure of "George Enescu" melogram

The second generating structure (**β**) is based on the symmetric mode 1:2, being made up of scales and interval leaps of thirds and fourths. The sonority that covers this structure combines the heroic expression of the brass timbre (trumpets-trombones), the tragic accents of the intonational incipit, due to the inverted chromatic formulas. The chord at the end of the exposition, a *precluster* composed of the sounds *C-C#-D-F#* displayed in parallel fourths, accentuates the tension of the discourse

Fig. 3 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part I – *Imprints*, mm. 4-9

The third generative structure, which the composer entitled "**thematic idea no. 1**" is dedicated to the woodwinds section and consists of sixteenth-

note formulas preceded by rests, acting as a signal. It has a fluid character and includes two cells inspired by George Enescu's *Chamber Symphony*. The structure appears in different instances appears throughout the work, being identifiable due to its distinct rhythm.

Fig. 4 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part I – *Imprints*, mm. 10-14

Sequentially, the composer creates a chain of contrasting moments, characterized by an oscillating expression, with timbral richness and diversity.

Tempo primo (m. 23) marks the first moment of orchestral tutti in which the *motif of introduction* (beta) is played, having a heroic character. It is made up of intervals characteristic to symmetrical mode 1:2: 4+, 7M, 2m. The thematic continuity gets dissipated by the intervention of the trumpet and the horns that play a modal structure similar to a military signal (m. 25).

Another unexpected change is marked by section marker 30. The writing is rarefied, the theme being played by the woodwinds section (oboe and English horn followed by clarinet). The atmosphere outlined is mysterious, the new modal theme (**E**) (which will be developed in part 3 of the symphony) being accompanied by chordophones in parallel octaves and seventh intervals on the harp.

The end of the first movement showcases another theme (**B**) in full display. It has a glorious character, exposed by the chordophones and woodwinds. The main motivic structures are performed by the trombone and the flute. Enescu's imprint is reiterated by the integration of the piano into the orchestral discourse and by the last motif of the first violin that evokes a fragment inspired by Enescu's creation (*Sonata No. 3 for piano and violin*).

Fig. 5 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part I – *Imprints*, mm. 45-55

Part II, suggestively entitled ***Contrasts***, is similar to the *Ying - Yang* symbol. The composer creates a continuous tension between drama and peace, between darkness and light.

In order to actualize this opposition, Viorel Munteanu utilized modern compositional techniques, integrating textures, sound densities and a wide diversity of timbres. On the same principles of contrasts, the sonata form is used, approached in a modern style.

The main theme (**C**) has an incisive, dynamic and fragmented character played by strings and horns. Composer Munteanu makes a new reference in his creation, a fragment of the work *Resonance I*, inspired by George Enescu's *Chamber Symphony*.

The drama and dynamism of the debut is continued by an incisive chorus of woodwinds and brass, complemented by the percussion, which has a solo moment. The independence of the rhythmic formulas of the three instruments (*tamburo*, *gran-cassa* and *tom-tom*) gives the feeling of a collective improvisation, a dramatic unleashing.

Fig. 6 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part II – *Contrasts*, mm. 5-9

The discourse is developed though free polyphony, by the juxtaposition of orchestral compartments that determine the configuration of a sonic accumulation.

A game of acoustic densities occurs in measure 25, where the composer configures a polyphonic texture of the string section by permuting the sounds belonging to the A flat mode. In the higher register, the woodwinds enunciate a chord composed of parallel fourths and fifths based on the note *E*. The complementarity of the two structures results in a *cluster* of density 9. The orchestral massiveness is dissipated by a moment of sudden rarefaction, in which the sounds of the vibraphone and the gong stand out, setting up the transition to the second theme of the sonata.

In a solar ambient, with ancestral reverberations, the strings play a lullaby from Transylvania, discovered by composer Viorel Munteanu in the work *Pages from the history of Romanian music* by ethnomusicologist George Breazul.

Fig. 7a George Breazul, *Pagini din Istoria muzicii românești* [Pages from the history of Romanian music], vol. 5

Ex. 7b Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part II – *Contrasts*, mm. 33-41

The theme is based on the *G* pentatonic scale, in which the *D* plagal cadence is used, oscillating between *G* and *D* centers. The orchestration is soft, the theme being accompanied by chordophones and short interventions by the muted trumpet.

The recapitulation (m. 88) restores the balance by reiterating the two contrasting themes (D-C), in a clear and concise manner, remembering the constitutive binomial of this part.

Part III, *Heterophonies*, is a tribute to contemporary music in which this type of writing is predominantly exploited. Viorel Munteanu approaches heterophonic writing in most of his creations (*Concertino* for flute, oboe and bassoon, *String Quartet No. 2*, *Symphony No. 1 "Glossa"*, *Glasurile Putnei* [The Voices of Putna]) which creates an expression deeply anchored in modernity. However, in this part of the symphony, the composer has a different approach, subjecting his own melogram to the process of transformation. In other words, a sound delta is created starting from an inner source - his own name. Thus, we are witnessing an ample moment of introspection, of self-searching, which merges a genuine effort of reflection.

The "Viorel Munteanu" melogram is founded on a modal structure based on the *C*, which has intervals characteristic of the Lydian (*C-F#*) and Ionian (3M, 4P) modes, the movable step *F-F#*, also having a 3m leap specific to the minor pentatonic scale. The *G#* is added to complete this structure and to facilitate permuting the sounds in multiple variations.

Fig. 8 "Viorel Zamfir Munteanu" melogram

Part III begins with the intonation of the melogram, transformed into the main thematic idea of the section (**E**). The theme is made up of three contrasting motifs, arranged consecutively in distinct orchestral compartments. The motif **δ** (delta), exposed by the flute and chordophones, is made up of long notes, which create a sound suspension due to the augmented fourth and the repeated *E* note. The motif ε (epsilon), played by the flutes, has a percussive character due to the pause in the sixteenths formula and to the accents on the *G* sounds arranged in the hemiola. The third motif, **ε**var is rhythmically similar to epsilon due to the anacrusis debut. The motif is performed by the oboe. Structurally, it contains a tetratony (*C-F#*), it has a bimodal character due to the movable step *F-F#* (Lydian/eolian) and modulating inflection in the pentatonic mode on *A*.

Fig. 9 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part III – *Heterophonies*, Main theme

Fig. 10 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part III – *Heterophonies*, mm. 1-9

The heterophony of the horns creates a surprising moment in which each of the four instruments holds independence, interpreting permutations of the basic mode. Thus, a game of registers and sound effects is created. On a secondary level, the horns are accompanied by an indeterminate sound (through the oscillating sounds created by the flute head) and by the effects created by the semantron and bells (mm. 45-48). The ending maintains the evocative character, created by a trombone monologue.

Fig. 11 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part III, mm. 45-49

Part IV, *Byzantine sources*, reveals the composer's passion for the Byzantine *melos*, for the Orthodox rite, for prayer and interiorization. The Byzantine intonations are integrated into numerous creations, such as *The Voices of Putna*, the Oratorio "Chemări spre mântuire" ["Calls for Salvation"] - *Pilgrims to Saint Parascheva*, *The Psaltic Triptych* and carols suites. The structure of this part is a variational lied (AB) which is based on two moments utilized previously in the chamber work *Ecouri din Transposibil* [Echoes from Transpossible], treated orchestrally in the Oratorio "Calls for Salvation", the second movement - *Mass* and *Road of the Cross*.

The main theme (**F**) is based on the Locrian mode, having intervallic structures of the Phrygian mode, the mobile step *C/C#*, which determines the oscillation towards the Aeolian mode. This debut with mystical echoes is attributed to the cello solo, which contains an introspective expression. Subsequently, a variation of the theme is taken up by the oboe and continued by the chordophones. It intertwines with the original version played by the clarinet. The accompaniment is soft, being joined by *sonagli* and bells, creating a sonic environment inspired by the liturgical ritual.

Fig. 12 Viorel Munteanu, *Symphony No. 2*, part IV - *Byzantine sources*, mm. 1-12

The second part develops the sound material used in *The Road of the Cross*, in a complex sound dramaturgy dominated by drama. In contrast with the first part, this section features moments of orchestral *tutti*, *cluster* chords, woodwinds and brass (trombone - trumpet) playing the main theme (**G**).

In the end, the composer reveals a new *shadow* inspired *by Symphony No. 1 "Gloss"* – the main theme of the creation played nostalgically by the clarinet.

Part V, *Dance of Colors*, is dominated by vitality, energy and contrast. This section puts forth "an explosion of rhythms born from the Romanian dances; a discourse that associates, horizontally and vertically, melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, dynamic and tonal elements in a compositional synthesis, having also brief episodes, with various returns from the previous parts".

Part 5 is based on the Rondo form, which determines the composer to bring together fragments from earlier creations, such as the song *I want to dance* from *Return to Blaga* – Seven poems for soprano and piano, and fragments from previous parts. The refrain of the rondo *I want to dance* is dominated by energy and force. Musically, this image is illustrated through frequent changes of meter, alternations of *aksak* measures in 4/4 time, and through the accelerated *tempo* and the themes extracted from Transylvanian folklore. The orchestration is dense, rich, involving many timbre changes in the thematic exposition (clarinet, flute, oboe). An important role is played by the percussion part, which provides an oriental touch to the dance and a variety of *colors* offered by the marimba, xylophone and piano.

In the last section, the second theme inspired by the lullaby (**D**) is played in its entirety, giving a nostalgic color to the musical discourse. In the

end, the sonic idea of the refrain is complete, recalling the passion, energy and volcanic character of the final sections from Viorel Munteanu's creation.

Conclusions

The unique character of the symphonic creation is offered by the multitude of themes merging throughout the creation (approximately 11 original themes) and by their development through many compositional methods and strategies (alternating sound densities, orchestral accumulations and rarefactions, etc.).

As Viorel Munteanu himself mentioned, "the music of this cycle gave me the opportunity to confess my fascinating friendship with the ethos, with the musical modes and syntaxes, with the wonder of sound architectures, which are always returning to my soul and mind, reformulated". The composer outlined a unique creative vision, by the motifs or themes recurring repeatedly throughout his work, as well as by the involvement of melograms, which have the role of generative motifs. The melograms used in this creation are "George Enescu" and "Viorel Zamfir Munteanu", *Symphony No. 2* being the first work in which the composer develops his own melogram. The variety of forms (prelude, sonata, variational lied and rondo) and their treatment into a modern acceptation, the complexity of the orchestration and the use of heterophony and polyphony as a writing technique are noted herewith.

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